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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000354

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI ADVISOR LOOKING AHEAD TO  
POST-DAMASCUS SUMMIT

REF: BEIRUT 351

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

#### SUMMARY

1. (C) Ghattas Khoury, advisor to majority leader Saad Hariri, does not believe enough pressure has been exerted on Syria to allow Lebanon's presidential election to take place. Michel Aoun, who seemed to reject all three points in the Arab League initiative, was the main problem. Lebanon would follow Saudi Arabia's lead in terms of the level of representation at the upcoming Arab League summit in Damascus. After the summit, March 14 would need to come up with a new action plan, perhaps the half plus one option, with or without Michel Sleiman as the candidate. However, it would need strong Arab support to go this route. End summary.

2. (C) Hariri advisor Ghattas Khoury and his wife Samar Jabbour-Khoury discussed the current state of play of the Arab League initiative with the Charge and Pol/Econ Chief on March 8.

#### SYRIA STILL CONTROLLING THE CARDS

3. (C) Noting that the March 5-6 Arab League foreign ministers meeting had not gone well, Khoury said March 14 representatives in Cairo told Moussa "very bluntly" that they had come to hear his proposal, not Bashar Asad's, and that if Moussa could not represent the Arab League, he should stop calling them. Khoury said he believed Moussa took the warning seriously. He did not believe Moussa would return to Lebanon prior to the March 11 electoral session, saying, "He won't show up if he has nothing in his hand." And there was not enough pressure on Syria to force them to allow the election to happen, he said.

4. (C) Noting that Kuwait and the UAE still had not transferred their contributions to the Special Tribunal, Khoury said the U.S. should approach them differently. They fear Syrian retribution in the form of bombs in the Gulf, he

explained, suggesting that one solution would be for them to make the payment through a third country.

#### CRAZY AOUNIES O BLAME

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15. (C) "That crazy General" Aoun is the problem, Khoury said. His core of "crazy" militants was sticking with him and will only declare him dead when he's dead. Not only does Aoun claim Sleiman is not a consensus candidate, but he continues to insist on a blocking third in the cabinet. And, despite his bloc's name ("Change and Reform"), Aoun wants to go back to the 1960 electoral law, Khoury laughed. But he won't do as well as he thinks in the next elections.

16. (C) The Charge, noting her recent trip to Zahle (reftel), asked whether it was possible to bring some Aoun-bloc MPs into the March 14 fold. Khoury said March 14 had offered MP Elie Skaff all kinds of incentives, including solutions to his financial problems, but he always backed out in the end. Khoury attributed this to Skaff's "baggage from the Syrian period;" as long as Rustom Ghazaleh (Syrian intelligence official) exists, this would continue to be the case. However, he added, Aoun doesn't control Zahle any more, and March 14 is gaining influence. And the easiest way to attract these MPs would be to elect Michel Sleiman as president; they would go to him, Khoury explained, which is easier than getting them to come to us (March 14).

#### FOLLOW THE SAUDI LEAD IN DAMASCUS

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17. (C) Khoury did not believe PM Siniora should represent Lebanon at the summit, arguing that not only did the other Arab leaders not like him, but it would not be good for Lebanon's Christians either. Instead, Lebanon should send a

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Christian delegation. If Saudi King Abdullah goes, Lebanon should send Amine Gemayel, who, as a former president, is the only Christian with enough stature. And the Syrians don't like him, he added. Cautioning that he had not discussed the idea with either Saad or Siniora, Khoury said he believed Siniora could be convinced of this plan. If the Saudis send a low-level representative, he added, then Lebanon can send anyone.

#### LOOKING AHEAD PAST DAMASCUS

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18. (C) Khoury agreed that Sleiman was playing his cards well, but said March 14 needed to reach the stage where he was on board with being elected by half plus one. Otherwise, March 14 would have to wait, but time was not on its side. Khoury did not believe Sleiman would be able to keep the country calm if the economic situation continued to deteriorate. He attributed the January 27 riots to a Syrian attempt to stir things up on the day Arab League members were holding a special meeting on Lebanon. Unfortunately, he said, the Syrians have many cards to play. He believed the recent lull in the intermittent confessional clashes seen since was due to "understandings" that riots would not solve anything.

19. (C) Khoury did not believe, however, that Sleiman was worried about a split within the army. Many Shia are worried about another war and complaining about the politics of Hizballah SYG Nasrallah, he explained. This is putting a lot of pressure on Nasrallah, forcing him to walk back his declaration calling for open war on Israel.

110. (C) Khoury suggested that following the March 29 summit, the March 14 bloc would need to look for a new solution and ways to continue to build momentum in its favor. April 26, the anniversary of Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, was the next significant date. But March 14 would be unable to pursue the half plus one option without the strong support of

other Arab League countries, at least Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The Egyptians, he noted, seemed to be divided, with the intelligence side speaking differently than the foreign office and the "old guy" (President Mubarak).

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